

February 27, 2018

Dear General Assembly Committee on Children,

My name is Camille Kritzman. I'm a Hartford resident and a community organizer with the CT Students for a Dream.

I'm testifying in favor on HB 5185: An Act Concerning Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

Although federally SIJ status is meant to include eligible youth under 21, this is not the case in Connecticut. Unfortunately those seeking to apply for SIJ status who are between the ages of 18-21 are unable to apply, because of CT's classification of a "juvenile". Although the difference between an 18 year old and 19 year old is near arbitrary, the difference in classification by CT statutes leaves a huge gap in access to youth seeking status who have suffered through abandonment or neglect.

I have witnessed first-hand the difference that this status can have on a youth's life. While working at East Hartford High school with Connecticut Student's for a Dream's College Access Program, I met youth were unaccompanied minors who received SIJ status. The students were working to earn money to support themselves, but also considering going to college, going after a career of their choosing, improving English, and looking forward to life after high school. I also met students who were 19, and did not qualify for SIJ status. These students had a different demeanor, worked under the table to survive, lived in the shadows in fear of deportation, and did not envision many prospects for themselves beyond graduation, if they were able to make it to that point. These youth came to the U.S in search of safety and security, only to be met with insurmountable barriers, even in a state that deems themselves a "welcoming" state to immigrants.

These youth have suffered tremendous losses, including death of family members, violence, and the destruction of their lives due to natural disasters. Passing this legislation would give them some much needed relief. Changing the definition of juvenile would send a life-changing message to these youth and inspire hope for their futures. Connecticut has the opportunity to join New York, Washington, California, and Maryland in passing legislation to grant these young people the protections available under federal law, but inaccessible in CT due to our state's statutory definition of "minor child."

The future of many young people are in your hands, I urge you to act on the right side of justice.

Thank you,

Camille Kritzman